

By the third week things were going badly for him. He didn't sleep at night and couldn't write during the day. At first the thoughts and flashes would come clearly and logically, but gradually they came faster and faster falling over each other to reach the surface of his mind, and he became so confused he was almost sick. Then he would have to lie down and try to rest. But the thoughts ran and scrambled and pushed against his head until it ached.

He saw the answer quite clearly one evening. There was only one thing to do, and he wondered why he hadn't thought of it before. That night he slept better than he had for days, but the rain still pounded mercilessly on the roof and made a music that he despised.

The next morning he got up, lit the fire and prepared breakfast. Rain was still coming when he looked out, and he could see water standing in the fields. He supposed the road past his house was flooded too, but he didn't look. After eating, he put on a black rubber coat and high boots, carefully put out the fire and raked ashes over the coals.

He was almost blinded by the storm when he stepped out, and he started toward the lake which was now higher than it had been for years. He paused for a moment on the sodden beach and then started in. His clothing kept him dry, but the rain started to trickle down inside his collar, and this annoyed him. When the water reached his waist he began to feel the cold, and he shivered and tried to draw the coat closer. It was hard walking. The waves seemed determined to carry him away, but when he glanced up he saw that a moving cloud revealed a silver sky and he kept on.

Soon there was only a swirl of water where he had been.

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## Mr. Meeker and the Frustrated Lycanthropist

Harry White

**M**R. MEEKER was beginning his evening walk through the park. He paused a moment on the steps of his apartment house and made final adjustments to his clothing. In precise order, he straightened the brim on his hat, brushed dandruff from the shoulders of his light gray suit, and inspected both toes of his shining black shoes for dust. Satisfied, he hung his ivory colored cane on his arm and stepped briskly into the deeply shadowed twilight.

A remarkably beautiful evening, thought Mr. Meeker. Fallen leaves from the park across the street were scudding over the pavement in the soft autumn wind, and quietly echoing auto horns sounded from the other end of the block. As Mr. Meeker stepped off the curb at the corner, a full moon slid from behind a cloud and silvered the windows of the apartments behind him.

Gently swinging his cane, Mr. Meeker crossed the street. He was a small man, past middle age; but his carriage was lithe and his movements swift and purposeful. His round face was beginning to show wrinkles, and lines radiated from the corners of his bright blue eyes which showed a constant good humor.

There were three graveled paths entering the park, but he selected the one on the right without hesitation. He had taken the one on the left night before last and the one in the middle last night. Mr. Meeker would again take the one on the left tomorrow night.

As he walked, the street noises receded quickly; and the light from lamps along the walk cast long angular shadows among the trees. His pace began to slacken and his progress became as much of an amble as he could achieve. He continued for awhile, relaxing in the stillness, which was broken only by the crunching of his leather soles in the gravel. The broken shadows of limbs and leaves passed soundlessly over the wraithlike grayness of his suit. The moonlight sinking through the trees turned his face ashen and accentuated the black band of his hat.

Suddenly he stopped. There, ahead of him, under a lamp, sat a man on a stone bench. He had his back to Mr. Meeker and was bent over, concentrating on a pad of paper which he held on his lap. He was mumbling.

Mr. Meeker watched him a moment—he was always interested in people—and then moved carefully over to the grass, where he advanced silently toward the crouching figure. So intense was the man's concentration that Mr. Meeker was able to walk to the rear of the bench and peer over the man's shoulder at the paper on his lap without being observed.

He stood quietly for a short time listening to the man's mumbled words. "Just can't get it right," he was saying in a guttural voice. "Must not have it all." Then in frustration, "Damn!"

Mr. Meeker squinted more intently at the pad and then, with a satisfied air, leaned back and planted his cane in the turf at his side. "May I assist you?" he said quietly.

The man leaped up, spilling paper on the ground, and faced Mr. Meeker. His eyes were wide and his hands trembled in the air before him.

"Come now," said Mr. Meeker soothingly, "no need to be frightened. No, no! Don't run. Here," and he began to retrieve the scattered sheets of white paper. "I'll help you."

"Help—?" questioned the trembling figure, obviously caught off guard. "I—I—," he faltered.

"Tut, tut," Mr. Meeker held up a restraining hand. "Of course I can help you. In my youth—if you will pardon my boasting—I was quite adept at this sort of thing."

"Here are your formulae," he said, thrusting the sheaf of paper into the bewildered man's hand. "Now, let's have a look at you."



The man stood before him, still puzzled and very much at a loss. He was tall, stooped, and rather muscular. His long hair was black but shot with brown streaks. His complexion was dark, and his skin was covered with a scraggly fuzz. He had long tapering hands, and his fingers ended in clawlike nails. Like an animal, thought Mr. Meeker, noting the wide band of ragged gray fur-like material which the fellow was wearing about his waist.

"Ah, my good man," Mr. Meeker clucked his tongue, "you were having very little success. Here, see. Your girdle of wolfskin must contact the epidermis."

Wrinkling his nose slightly, Mr. Meeker plucked the man's shirt tail out. "And you spoke the incantation too slowly. It must be done quickly, you see, before the spell can take effect completely; or you can't make the proper sounds as the transformation progresses."

"And the setting, my good fellow,"—he began to guide the man into the trees—"must be proper. Not an electric lamp! Moonlight's the thing."

The larger man, still quite confused and a trifle awed by authority, allowed himself to be propelled into the darkness by the slight form of Mr. Meeker.

"There, now. This is about right." They stood in a small clearing in the park. Not a sound penetrated from the city. Trees, half-bare limbs groping into the night sky, surrounded them. Clouds seethed and rolled about the moon but left its high undimmed, spotlighting the pair in the park.

"Now," spoke Mr. Meeker seriously, "we can begin. Lift your arms above your head. In this manner. Observe."

He pursed his lips and paused, frowning. "Ah, yes. I recall the words now. Repeat—no, no—Keep your arms up! Repeat after me—and don't tremble so. Compose yourself."

Mr. Meeker started chanting in monosyllables. His voice was low and soft at first; but, as the spell began to take form, the words began to roll in a pulsing rhythm, mounting—as he kept time with his cane—to an impending crescendo. The sounds came faster and faster, ringing and vibrating in the clearing until the trees shivered and seemed to draw away.

Suddenly, Mr. Meeker raised his cane in the air. The torrent of the incantation ended abruptly on a sharp note. He stood transfixed and silent; and then, with a shout, he brought the cane down like a baton. There was a sound of thunder and the moonlit shadows of the trees wavered. The form of the man convulsed, melted swiftly, and flowed into a four-legged shape. A werewolf stood on the ground, eyes glowing and ivory teeth shining. It shook itself.

"Now that was not so difficult," said Mr. Meeker, "although I'm afraid"—and he mopped perspiration from his forehead—"that I did most of the work for you."

The monster snarled and advanced hesitatingly toward Mr. Meeker who looked a bit startled. But suddenly he smiled in comprehension and clapped his hands.

"What an admirable stroke of genius. A spirit after my own heart." Mr. Meeker almost capered. "I am to be your first victim. Splendid! Splendid!

The wolf halted, stunned by this reaction.

Mr. Meeker's smile changed to a saddened look. "But I must admit I am a trifle grieved that a creature of your ambition does not realize just who I am. And this," said Mr. Meeker, regret softening his voice, "also grieves me."

With this statement, he pointed his cane at the apparition which promptly vanished in a flash of fire and brimstone.

Mr. Meeker coughed and vigorously fanned the smoke away. He stood a moment and then, with his cane swinging from his arm, turned back toward the walk.

"A pity," he murmured to himself, "but he had little talent. Besides, I could scarcely allow such an out-of-date agent to run amok in this day and age. My present methods are much too refined."

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## A Dialogue (With Apologies to Socrates)

Alice Ashby

(The scene is laid in a private chamber in the Senate Office Building; and the whole conversation is narrated by Socrates, the evening after it took place, to the officials of the various television networks.)

I went to the Senate Office Building that I might converse with Polemarsky who had been examined the previous day by the Senate committee on un-American activities. He had succeeded in evading the basic loyalty question by invoking the fifth amendment.

Polemarsky entered; and after the usual preliminaries, I began.

Are you, or have you ever been a member of the Communist party?

I refuse to answer this question on the grounds that it might incriminate me.

Do you mean by "incriminate" that you could not answer this question with impunity?

If I were to answer that I had been affiliated with such a party, I would certainly be prosecuted or feel the repercussions of such a statement. It is the tendency of the people to allow their opinions to be swayed against a person because of his previous associations. Yes, that was my meaning.

Should you not justly fear unhappy results if there has been an association deemed undesirable by the majority of the people?

Certainly.